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14. ABSTRACT United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) faces a multi-faceted, financially powerful, and tireless opponent in its ongoing struggle against drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). Operating in a secondary theater of war and faced with budget and asset constraints, SOUTHCOM must efficiently leverage its resources against highly sophisticated narcotics-trafficking networks or risk losing effectiveness in the narcotics interdiction realm. Disrupting the various DTOs and their sophisticated production and transportation networks is a complex task and interdiction goals are not being met by SOUTHCOM. This paper examines SOUTHCOM's interdiction mission through analysis of the operational factors of <i>space</i> , <i>force</i> , and <i>time</i> , specifically focusing on the difficulties that Venezuela presents in the realm of <i>space</i> , advantages that unmanned aerial vehicles present in terms of <i>force</i> and the impact of <i>time</i> regarding the beneficial long-term effects of bilateral agreements and partner-nation aid packages.					
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**Analyzing the Operational Factors of Space, Force, and Time in United States Southern
Command's Counter Drug / Counter Narcoterrorism Mission**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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ABSTRACT

United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) faces a multi-faceted, financially powerful, and tireless opponent in its ongoing struggle against drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). Operating in a secondary theater of ~~operations~~^{war} and faced with budget and asset constraints, SOUTHCOM must efficiently leverage its resources against highly sophisticated narcotics-trafficking networks or risk losing effectiveness in the narcotics interdiction realm. Disrupting the various DTOs and their sophisticated production and transportation networks is a complex task and interdiction goals are not being met by SOUTHCOM. This paper examines SOUTHCOM's interdiction mission through analysis of the operational factors of *space*, *force*, and *time*, specifically focusing on the difficulties that Venezuela presents in the realm of *space*, advantages that unmanned aerial vehicles present in terms of *force*, and the impact of *time* regarding the beneficial long-term effects of bilateral agreements and partner-nation aid packages.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense is the lead federal agency in efforts to detect and monitor aerial and maritime transit of illegal narcotics bound for the United States.¹ As the geographic combatant command responsible for safeguarding national interests in Central and South America, United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) utilizes subordinate commands such as the Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S) to execute counter narcotics and interdiction missions.

Per the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), SOUTHCOM's interdiction percentages are not meeting prescribed performance goals. In 2008, for example, interdiction rates in SOUTHCOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR) numbered in the low twenty percent range, missing the national target of 25% and falling well below the 2014 goal of 40 percent.² According to the ONDCP, this fact "suggests that there remains much room for continued improvement."³ That said, how do the Operational Factors of Space, Force, and Time impact SOUTHCOM's interdiction goals and which factors present the most critical areas of focus?

This paper will center on the interdiction of illegal narcotics from South America to the United States by analyzing the operational factors as they pertain to both DTOs and SOUTHCOM. Although an immense number of space-force-time factors impact SOUTHCOM's operations, this assessment focuses on arguably the three most critical components embedded in the interdiction mission. These factors include the difficulties that Venezuela presents in the realm of *space*, advantages that unmanned aerial vehicles present

¹ www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/pages/counterNarco.php (accessed 1 April 2010).

² National Drug Control Strategy 2009 Annual Report, 29.

³ Office of National Drug Control Policy, Transit Zone Interdiction Operations. http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/international/factsht/transit_zone_interdic_op.html (accessed 3 March 2010).

in terms of *force* and the impact of *time* regarding the beneficial long-term effects of bilateral agreements and partner-nation aid packages.

BACKGROUND

As the United States and its allies continue to fight an expensive and resource-intensive Global War on Terror, efforts aimed at stemming the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States may appear to be a mission with little national security relevance. However, narcotics profits and technology gains made by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are very real problems that present a legitimate threat to the security of the United States and U.S. partners in the Western Hemisphere. As stated in the National Drug Control Strategy, "Ill-gotten profits and nefarious alliances cultivated by the drug trade also facilitate the activities of terrorists and organized criminals worldwide."⁴ Analysis from the Brookings Institute assesses that "burgeoning and unconstrained drug production and other illicit economies have profound negative consequences for states and local stability."⁵

Regional terrorist groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Army of Liberation (ELN) have been identified by the United States as Foreign Terrorist Organizations whose "involvement in narcotics fuels armed conflict, insecurity, and generates one of the world's largest internal displacements of rural populations."⁶ The possible involvement of Iran in South American narcotrafficking provides a disturbing clue regarding the seriousness of the issue and its impact on U.S.

⁴ National Drug Control Strategy 2009 Annual Report, 23.

⁵ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Transnational Drug Enterprises: Threats to Global Stability and U.S. National Security", *Brookings Institute*, October 1, 2009. http://www.brookings.edu/testimony/2009/1001_drug_enterprises_felbabbrown.aspx (accessed 19 April, 2010).

⁶ United States Department of State, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 1, 201.

national security.⁷ Beyond funding terror networks, narcotics exact a considerable humanitarian and economic toll on the United States.⁸ More than 21,000 Americans were killed by illegal narcotics in 2008, and the financial cost was estimated at nearly \$215 billion, reflected in "an overburdened justice system, strained healthcare system, lost productivity, and environmental destruction."⁹

International narcotics statistics are reviewed annually by the United States and nations may be designated as either major drug transit or major drug producing countries by the President. Of the 20 nations listed as meeting the criteria for 2008, 12 are found in SOUTHCOM's AOR: The Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.¹⁰ Mexico, it should be noted, is considered a major transit country, but it falls within Northern Command's AOR.

SPACE: VENEZUELA

*"To enhance success in combat, the operational commanders and their staffs must properly evaluate both the human and physical elements of the factor of space."*¹¹

SOUTHCOM's interdiction metrics focus on narcotics intercepted in the Western Hemisphere Transit Zone (WHTZ), the vast maritime area between the northern coast of the South American continent and the southern boundary of the United States, including the Caribbean Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, Eastern Pacific Ocean, and associated airspace.

Aggressive use of the full spectrum of military and diplomatic means has significantly

⁷ Norman A. Bailey, "What are the Persians Doing Over Here?", Challenges to Security in the Hemisphere Task Force, University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Policy, March 30, 2010, 5.

⁸ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 11.

⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, National Drug Threat Assessment 2010, 3.

¹⁰ Office of National Drug Control Policy, Certification for Major Illicit Drug Producing and Transit Countries. http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/international/factsht/cert_major_illct.html (accessed 24 February, 2010).

¹¹ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 2009, 3-7.

impacted freedoms and techniques once enjoyed by DTOs and steadily increasing interdiction rates have forced traffickers to change their production and smuggling methods. The fact remains, however, that patrolling an area of roughly 42 million square miles against a resourceful enemy is a difficult and complex task that demands space management efforts beyond the simple addition of forces.

A number of nations play major roles in the production and trafficking of narcotics in South America, but SOUTHCOM's operations in the source zone have traditionally centered on Colombia. Although Colombia has seen marked improvements in its narcotics control policies and national security in the past decade, it still represents a major hub of drug production and distribution. According to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) of 2009, Colombia "remains the principal supplier of cocaine to the world."¹² Further, "nearly 90 percent of the cocaine entering the U.S. is processed in Colombia, and the country remains the primary source for heroin used east of the Mississippi River."¹³

Although significant challenges continue to trouble Colombia, the genuine willingness of the Government of Colombia (GOC) to address narcotics-related problems has made a major impact. According to the U.S. Department of State, "Colombia has made real progress in stemming the growth and distribution of illicit narcotics as well as regaining control over much of the country," largely as a result of Plan Colombia, a \$7.5 billion anti-narcotics and social reform program instituted by the GOC.¹⁴

¹² United States Department of State, 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 1, 200.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Fact Sheet, January 20, 2009. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/fs/113707.htm> (accessed 3 March, 2010).

Based on Colombia's coca cultivation and maritime smuggling activities, conventional wisdom would suggest that it presents the largest space-force issue to SOUTHCOM and the issues facing Colombia continue to demand strict attention. Currently, however, Venezuela has supplanted Colombia as the most critical space problem that SOUTHCOM must contend with in order to meet *current interdiction goals*. Until the Government of Venezuela (GOV) takes an active role in addressing the narcotrafficking facilitated within its borders, SOUTHCOM cannot meet performance or effectiveness measures in the near or long term.

According to Dr. Milan Vego in *Joint Operational Warfare*, the factor of space doesn't only deal with physical territory, but also includes political systems, natures of government, and ideologies, as well.¹⁵ In light of Dr. Vego's definition, Venezuela presents a significant "human space" issue to SOUTHCOM as a non-failed state that rejects the vast majority of U.S. counter-narcotics efforts as the result of political ideologies and jingoism. Further, Venezuela has "failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements" and has earned the unenviable distinction of being one of only two nations worldwide to become "decertified" in the execution of its counternarcotics programs.¹⁶

Reacting to increased military and police pressure and presence in Colombia, traffickers are using Venezuela as a "main distribution point" for destinations throughout the Caribbean, West Africa, and Europe.¹⁷ Following a phenomenon known as the "balloon effect," traffickers are following the path of least resistance to get their products to market,

¹⁵ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 2009, 3-7.

¹⁶ Office of National Drug Control Policy, Certification for Major Illicit Drug Producing and Transit Countries. http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/international/factsht/cert_major_illct.html (accessed 24 February, 2010).

¹⁷ National Drug Control Strategy 2009 Annual Report, 31.

steering clear of SOUTHCOM's sphere of influence and moving away from areas that have become too costly or dangerous, making Venezuela a prime operating environment.¹⁸ To illustrate this, the amount of cocaine transiting through Venezuela via aircraft or maritime means from 2004-2009 increased from 54 to 143 metric tons.¹⁹

Due to the success of U.S. and GOC Air Bridge Denial Programs which targeted airborne trafficking, illegal smuggling flights originating in Colombia have decreased by 95% since 2003, recording an all-time low of just 32 events during 2009.²⁰ In stark contrast, smuggling flights originating in Venezuela have increased significantly. For instance, JIATF-S estimates that 91 percent of suspected smuggling flights destined for Hispaniola originate in Venezuela from a series of small airports located along the northern coast.²¹ Accordingly, "Venezuela now accounts for the vast majority of suspected non-commercial drug trafficking flights" in South America.²²

Whereas the recent approval of U.S. access to seven Colombian air bases increases SOUTHCOM's ability to perform effective interdiction operations, lack of U.S. presence or involvement within the borders of Venezuela provides DTOs a relatively safe haven to conduct trafficking operations. If Venezuela's security forces were performing a credible job interdicting narcotics on their own, lack of U.S. involvement may not amount to a major disadvantage. Instead, "protection of the drug trade by the Venezuelan National Guard is so notorious that the Guard is sometimes referred to as an additional drug cartel."²³ As a result of Venezuela's largely ineffective anti-trafficking policies, considerable amounts of narcotics

¹⁸ www.drugpolicy.org/global/drugtraffick/ (accessed 26 March, 2010).

¹⁹ United States Department of State, 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 1, 656.

²⁰ Ibid. 213.

²¹ National Drug Control Strategy 2009 Annual Report, 31.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bailey, "What are the Persians Doing Over Here?", Challenges to Security in the Hemisphere Task Force, University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Policy, March 30, 2010, 5.

now enter the WHTZ, a far larger and more complex space to patrol and monitor. This reality is reflected in SOUTHCOM's admission that "every effort to interdict (traffickers) within Colombia or just as they depart Colombian territory pays tremendous dividends, as opposed to dispersing limited interdiction resources across the 42 million square miles of the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific."²⁴ Venezuela acts as the backdoor method that smugglers use to traffic their products from the source zone to the transit zone. In fact, it is estimated that over 230 metric tons of cocaine will enter the Caribbean transit zone in 2010, a substantial portion of which is expected to be routed through Venezuela.²⁵

Quite simply, DTOs are nullifying the space-force advantage methodically gained by SOUTHCOM and the GOC by moving large portions of their trafficking operations to Venezuela, negating many of the hard-fought successes gained in Colombia over the past decade. According to Newsweek, "Colombia's neighbors have become more lax, creating new business opportunities for growers and others... *drugs that in the past might have been interdicted* exiting Colombia through its ports or airfields are now crossing borders into (Venezuela and Bolivia), making them harder to catch on their way to Mexico or, increasingly, overseas."²⁶ (Italics added for emphasis)

Beyond pure narcotrafficking, Venezuela's policies are also allowing terror organizations such as the FARC to regroup and reorganize in the ungoverned border region shared with Colombia. Faced with reductions in membership and pursued by Colombian authorities, Venezuela has served as a sanctuary for the narcoterrorists that Plan Colombia was instituted to expel. Even more concerning is Iranian presence in Venezuela and their

²⁴ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 12.

²⁵ JIATF-S Command Brief.

²⁶ Adam B. Cushner, "The Truth About Plan Colombia", *Newsweek*, January 12, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/177681>, (accessed 17 April, 2010).

role in the narcotics trade. According to the University of Miami's Center for Hemispheric Policy, "Iranian participation in drug trafficking through Venezuela, to Central America, Mexico, the United States, the Caribbean and to Europe through West Africa is extensive. The proceeds are used to finance further penetration of Iranian interests in the region, as well as to partially fund, along with extortion and kidnapping, the (terrorist groups)."²⁷

Although the Venezuelan government has cooperated with the United States Coast Guard on a limited basis and provided marginal assistance in other anti-trafficking matters, attempts at building a bilateral counterdrug relationship "have been routinely rebuffed by the Venezuelan Government."²⁸ There is hope, however, that the GOV can become a partner in the counter-narcotics mission. Recent re-instatement of the ambassador to the United States is a step in the right direction. Soaring crime rates and fluctuations in oil prices may present opportunities to for the U.S. to engage the GOV in meaningful anti-narcotics discussions aimed at stabilizing Venezuela's economy and national security.²⁹ International pressure may also serve as a powerful anti-trafficking tool, as a "growing portion" of the narcotics transiting Venezuela are headed for European and African markets.³⁰

FORCE: UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

"Since the advent of the industrial era, new technological advances have provided better and more effective means of overcoming the factor of space."³¹

²⁷ Bailey, "What are the Persians Doing Over Here?", Challenges to Security in the Hemisphere Task Force, University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Policy, March 30, 2010, 4.

²⁸ National Drug Control Strategy 2009 Annual Report, 31.

²⁹ Kevin Casas-Zamora, "Hugo Chavez: A Lane Duck No More", *Brookings Institute*, February 18, 2009. http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0218_chavez_casas zamora.aspx (accessed 16 April, 2010).

³⁰ 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 1, 648.

³¹ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 2009, 3-51.

As a by-product of its considerable dimensions, the WHTZ provides a prime operating space for traffickers through both air and maritime means. Recent trends have indicated that the majority of narcotics shipments transit through the vast spaces of the Eastern Pacific, vice the relatively confined and aggressively monitored Caribbean. For example, 2007 statistics show that 68% of narcotics leaving South America transited the Eastern Pacific, 21% the Western Caribbean, 10% through the Central Caribbean and less than 1% directly to the United States.³² Maritime trafficking is the most common method in the Eastern Pacific, whereas most airborne smuggling takes place between northern Venezuela and various Central American and Caribbean transit points, although the use of air or sea routes is dependent on the success of interdiction efforts in the area. Unlike the South American land mass, rough terrain, lax governmental policies and a major "human space" component aren't the most vexing issues slowing anti-trafficking efforts. Instead, DTOs utilize the overwhelming size of the operating space as a decided advantage and they manipulate it very effectively. For example, despite interdicting over 228 metric tons of cocaine and apprehending more than 317 traffickers in 2008, JIATF-S intercepted less than 25% of narcotics estimated to have made their way to the United States, a fact that illustrates the massive quantities of narcotics routed across the WHTZ in a given year.³³ In fact, over 1500 metric tons of cocaine are expected to move from the source zone through the transit zone in 2010.³⁴

DTOs have routinely displayed great resourcefulness and flexibility in their WHTZ trafficking efforts, utilizing a maritime force that is well suited for the "battle space" in which

³² Office of National Drug Control Policy, Transit Zone Interdiction Operations. http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/international/factsht/transit_zone_interdic_op.html (accessed 3 March, 2010).

³³ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 12.

³⁴ JIATF-S Command Brief.

they are operating. According to SOUTHCOM, "[DTOs] are highly innovative and keep investing in relatively low cost and unique conveyance and concealment technologies to counter our detection systems."³⁵ Fishing boats and other common vessels form the backbone of the trafficking network, frequently augmented by "go-fast" motor boats that travel at high speed, usually at night, to evade detection. DTOs also effectively manipulate the battle space by transiting littoral areas when possible, taking advantage of traffic schemes and international boundaries in order to avoid interdiction forces.

A new and highly effective trafficking vessel developed and utilized by DTOs is the Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible, or "SPSS." Providing a major improvement in DTO force capability, SPSS vessels present a serious dilemma to interdiction forces as they are virtually undetectable to the naked eye or airborne radar systems once underway. Manned by 3-4 person crews, average-sized SPSS vessels are capable of carrying between 4-12 metric tons of cocaine and are estimated to "account for approximately 30 percent of cocaine movement in the drug trafficking transit zones."³⁶ Further providing a major space-force benefit, it is estimated that an SPSS can travel from Ecuador to Mexico without the need to refuel.³⁷ Countering the SPSS threat is a critical force issue that SOUTHCOM continues to face, as SPSS events increased from just 23 from 2001-2007 to an estimated 85 in 2008.³⁸ SOUTHCOM must develop a long-term solution to counter the threat, or risk missing both performance and effectiveness measures in the foreseeable future.

Increasing the numbers of aircraft and ships patrolling the WHZ is an obvious response to the force allocation dilemmas SOUTHCOM planners continuously address,

³⁵ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 11.

³⁶ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 25.

³⁷ Rafael Luna Noguera, "Submersibles, New Threat", *La Prensa*, 10 May, 2008.
<http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/frame> (accessed 24 February, 2010).

³⁸ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/spss.html> (accessed 16 April, 2010).

whether the target is an airplane, "go-fast" or SPSS. In order to essentially double the interdiction figures posted in 2008 by 2014, employing twice the number of "conventional" platforms currently engaged in interdiction missions would be a sensible place to start. This expectation, however, is unrealistic, especially in light of the competing force requirements that Combatant Commanders around the world demand. Further, existing resource requirements identified by JIATF-S in the form of flight hours or steaming days have not been adequately filled over the past decade.³⁹ A significant increase in available counter-narcotics forces is not likely, and even if executed, doesn't necessarily provide an effective solution.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) present the most compelling force upgrade available to SOUTHCOM and more funding, even at the expense of less steaming days or flight hours, needs to be directed towards UAV development and employment throughout the AOR. Whether based on surface combatants or launched from forward operating locations (FOLs), UAVs hold great potential as highly capable detection and monitoring platforms, especially in the realm of counter-SPSS and littoral operations.

The concept of using UAVs in support counter-drug operations is not new. In fact, UAVs are already being tested by SOUTHCOM and other agencies for viability in the counter-narcotics mission.⁴⁰ Widespread use throughout the AOR, however, has yet to take place and full scale implementation cannot afford to be delayed. Longer on-station times and stealth are two of the most mission-critical capabilities that UAVs bring to the fight. Using a typical U.S. ship/helicopter team as an example, UAVs could provide night searches of maritime areas, whereas the helicopter crew would provide airborne support during the day,

³⁹ JIATF-S Command Brief.

⁴⁰ Jose Ruiz, "SOUTHCOM, El Salvador Evaluate Use of UAVs for Counter Drug Missions", May 28, 2009. <http://www.southcom.mil/appssc/news.php?storyId+1776> (accessed 18 April, 2010).

manned with Coast Guard gunners capable of executing warning shots and disabling fire against go-fast vessels or other smuggling conveyances. Although intended to operate in conjunction with the Navy's Littoral Combat Ship, the recent detection of two smuggling vessels by a Fire Scout UAV embarked on a U.S. frigate indicates the effectiveness of ship-launched drones operating from smaller, less expensive, surface combatants without the need for additional shipboard personnel. Although maintenance and training issues are particularly complex while operating in the maritime environment, measures are already in place by the Navy to address developmental areas that require further attention. Sensor package upgrades, to include all-important RADAR capability, will be integrated into the Fire Scout in the near future.

Predator and Reaper drones, currently in use throughout the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters, have the potential to act as major space-force equalizers when launched from FOLs. Capable of remaining airborne for over 40 hours, these UAVs would serve as ideal platforms to monitor the coastal regions most likely to support SPSS launches and other trafficking operations. Proven in combat environments, Predators and Reapers have almost tripled the amount of sorties undertaken per day since 2006 and have provided over 16,000 hours of video data to controllers per month in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴¹ At the cost of roughly \$5 million, compared to manned systems that cost ten to twenty times as much, Predators could be deployed throughout the Colombian coast in large numbers, denying DTOs the secret SPSS launch and construction sites that have resulted in significant smuggling success in the

⁴¹ Christopher Drew, "Drones Are U.S. Weapons of Choice Fighting Qaeda", *New York Times*, March 16, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/17/business/17uav.html> (accessed 18 April, 2010).

past few years. Heron drones have already flown over 100 hours along the Pacific Coast of Central America, providing valuable information to ground-based counter-narcotics teams.⁴²

Like any military hardware system, UAVs are not perfect. Crash rates are much higher than manned aircraft and trained operators are in high demand. Based on the potential benefits that UAVs would provide to SOUTHCOM, however, budgeting and manning plans must be altered to introduce these force-multiplying assets throughout the AOR. The ability to operate overland, in the littorals, and from surface ships set UAVs apart in flexibility and mission accomplishment.

TIME: BILATERAL AGREEMENTS AND AID PACKAGES

"Commanders should evaluate a theater in terms of space and the time necessary to defeat the enemy force and accomplish the assigned objective."⁴³

Facing an adversary that holds many advantages in the space-force realm, it can be argued that SOUTHCOM benefits from the manipulation and control of time. Time effects SOUTHCOM's operations in both the near and long term, from short-fused intelligence-driven actions to multi-layered aid packages and bilateral agreements focused on regional stability and economic growth. Those packages and agreements often require large amounts of funding and equal portions of patience from political leaders and planners, as their effectiveness is measured over decades, not months or years. In fact, the United States has narcotics-related bilateral agreements with over 26 nations in SOUTHCOM's AOR, a testament to the power of deep-rooted relationships and shared commitment towards lasting

⁴² Jose Ruiz, "SOUTHCOM, El Salvador Evaluate Use of UAVs for Counter Drug Missions", May 28, 2009. <http://www.southcom.mil/appssc/news.php?storyId+1776> (accessed 18 April, 2010).

⁴³ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 2009, 3-57.

security.⁴⁴ To ensure success in the future, SOUTHCOM must continue to invest in enduring relationships with partner nations despite their high cost and minimal early returns, regardless of political pressure or budgetary concerns.

Although it may appear that long-term efforts are not the most effective way to deal with DTOs that seemingly grow more politically and financially powerful by the day, rushing the implementation of anti-narcotics reform packages can actually weaken governmental efforts and create more powerful cartels. According to The Brookings Institute, "premature measures" that are enacted before the appropriate political and societal frameworks are constructed can be counterproductive and detrimental to mission accomplishment.⁴⁵

For example, in an attempt to manage Colombia's vast territory and impact the country's cocaine and heroin production infrastructure, the Government of Colombia, partnered with SOUTHCOM and other U.S. agencies, has made major progress. Despite the fact that U.S. military and defense contractor presence in South America numbered around only 400 personnel in 2007, use of bilateral agreements and aid packages have served as considerable force expansion and influence tools.⁴⁶ The most effective program to date has been "Plan Colombia," a multi-national, \$7.5 billion civil/military aid program aimed at "promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society."⁴⁷

Plan Colombia and follow-up initiatives have matured and become increasingly effective over the long-term. Initiated in 1999 with the goals of "providing funding to

⁴⁴ JIATF-S Command Brief.

⁴⁵ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Transnational Drug Enterprises: Threats to Global Stability and U.S. National Security", *Brookings Institute*, October 1, 2009. http://www.brookings.edu/testimony/2009/1001_drug_enterprises_felbabbrown.aspx (accessed 19 April, 2010).

⁴⁶ <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/factFiles.php?id=35> (accessed 24 February, 2010).

⁴⁷ http://www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/colombia/fs_000328_plancolombia.html (accessed 19 March, 2010).

support increased security and counternarcotics efforts, and to address issues of rural development, rule of law, human rights, and support for displaced persons", it has made a significant impact in the future of Colombia and SOUTHCOM's efforts in the AOR.⁴⁸

Homicide rates, kidnappings, and terror group enrollment rates have declined significantly since 2002 as the result of Plan Colombia initiatives that relied on time to develop and grow.⁴⁹

The greater exposure that civilian populations of at-risk nations have to see the benefits of long-range stabilization plans and improvement projects, the more successful those programs stand to become. For example, Thailand's government has successfully eradicated opium production and trafficking "primarily through a 30-year process involving investments in roads, communication, health, education, and improvement of social services."⁵⁰ Military partnership programs also benefit from time, as forces training with SOUTHCOM commands become more proficient and capable of conducting operations independently. In 2008 alone, the Department of Defense claims to have trained or qualified roughly 5,900 personnel associated with counter narcotics activities in SOUTHCOM's AOR.⁵¹ Over time, those numbers can become quite substantial.

As noted in SOUTHCOM's 2009 Posture Statement, "in the aggregate, poverty and inequality make whole regional populations vulnerable to the influence of illicit activity—such as drugs, crime, and gangs."⁵² Winning the "hearts and minds" of the general population, many of whom provide support to the DTOs, is a crucial battleground in the

⁴⁸ USAID, Assessment of the Implementation of Plan Colombia, April 17, 2009, iii.

⁴⁹ U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 15.

⁵⁰ USAID, Assessment of the Implementation of Plan Colombia, April 17, 2009, vii.

⁵¹ National Drug Control Strategy, FY2010 Budget Summary, 25.

⁵² U.S. Southern Command 2009 Posture Statement, 10.

control of “human” space and is directly related to the longevity of programs developed to provide alternatives to employment in narcotics-related trades.

The burgeoning relationship between SOUTHCOM, NORTHCOM and the Government of Mexico (GOM) is on the verge of becoming a mature, long-standing partnership, critical to hemispheric security. Anchored by the Merida Initiative, a 1.4 billion aid program in place since 2008, USG and GOM cooperation against DTOs is strengthening, "after decades of mistrust and sometimes betrayal."⁵³ The Merida Initiative provides police training and military hardware to the GOM while laying the framework for a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship between both countries.

These anti-narcotics programs, however, will only prove to be successful if they are crafted with longevity in mind and supported over the long term. As the tools most impacted by time, partner-nation aid packages and bilateral agreements must be developed and implemented with the understanding that their effectiveness is directly related to the amount of foresight and time given in support. Time is on SOUTHCOM's side, as long as funding and patience, mixed with policy agility and expert input, are prioritized.

CONCLUSION

*"The most complicated process for operational commanders and their staffs is to properly evaluate the factors of space, time, and force in their various combinations and then harmonize them with the assigned operational or strategic objective to be accomplished."*⁵⁴

⁵³ William Booth and Steve Fainaru, "U.S., Mexico Align Against Common Foe: Brutal Narcotics Trade", *The Washington Post*, November 22, 2009, A01.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/21/AR2009112102008.html> (accessed 24 February, 2010).

⁵⁴ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 2009, 3-51.

There are no easy solutions to the problems that SOUTHCOM faces in the struggle against DTOs and narcoterrorists. SOUTHCOM's continuing efforts to stem the tide of narcotics produced and trafficked through South America and the WHZ have been successful considering the inherent space-force advantages held by DTOs, but additional efforts need to be focused towards Venezuela (Space), UAVs (Force), and long-term bilateral agreements and partnerships (Time). Tacit Venezuelan support for narcotraffickers needs to be addressed and curtailed, as efforts made in Colombia become jeopardized as a result of the permissive environment that DTOs continue to manipulate. A complex diplomatic issue, Venezuela's narcotics policies are a legitimate national security issue facing the United States.

Although assigning additional resources in the form of ships and aircraft to this critical "theater of war" would certainly be of great benefit, the timely introduction of UAVs and related technologies is the future of counter narcotics monitoring and surveillance. Capable of effectively complementing manned systems, UAVs have the potential to be used against various trafficking conveyances, including fishing boats, "go-fast" vessels, and SPSS watercraft.

Finally, SOUTHCOM must continue to leverage time in the support of bilateral agreements and anti-narcotics/nation-building programs, which have proven to be the most powerful and longest-lasting tools in the "war against drugs". These programs, including Plan Colombia and Mexico's Merida Initiative, are expensive and require time to take effect, but they hold the key to defeating cartels and narcoterrorists.

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